

## Harmony and Disharmony in the Anthracite Coal Fields, 1902 (Part 1)

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The mine operators regarded the concessions to the miners that they made during the 1900 strike as a tactical retreat. They honored the new wage scales but refused to meet with miners' committees, declaring that they did not represent the employees. The UMW convention of March 1901 authorized a strike if the operators did not recognize the union and negotiate a settlement of grievances.

**Anthracite Coal Strike, May 15, 1902—October 23, 1902**, dubbed by the miners, *The Great Strike*. The central question to be answered by the 1902 strike: Who's in charge of the mines and mining, the present operators or the UMW?

An excellent summary statement about the beginning of the strike was presented in an article that was published in a Carbondale newspaper on May 12, 1902. Here is that short, but fact-filled article: **“WORK STOPS IN COAL REGIONS. / 125,000 GO OUT ON TEMPORARY STRIKE ORDER. / Voting of Local Unions Indicates That the Strike Will Be Made Permanent at Wednesday’s Convention—Many Railroad Men Out of Work Already. / WILKES-BARRE, Pa., May 12—**About 125,000 mine workers went on strike in the anthracite region to-day to await the decision of their delegates to the Hazleton convention on Wednesday, when they will determine whether the strike is to become permanent. Not one of the 357 collieries worked and not a ton of coal was mined [emphasis added]. The engineers, firemen and pump runners remained at work. If the convention on Wednesday orders a strike, they will be called out. The firemen have promised to respond in a body, the engineers and pumpmen are not so certain. The closing of the mines was accomplished without disorder. The companies placed armed Coal and Iron policemen at most of the collieries. / Of the seventy-one local unions in this valley [emphasis added], about sixty instructed directly for a strike, six sent their men with no instructions; the others told their men to vote for a strike unless there seemed hope of concessions.”

On May 14, 1902, the UMW members, at the Hazleton convention of May 14, voted (May 15) to make the strike permanent. Here is the text on a newspaper clipping, dated May 16, 1902 from a Scranton newspaper: **“A Strike Declared.** / The convention of Mine Workers held at Hazleton, after prolonged deliberation, voted to continue the suspension of work, thus precipitating what may prove to be one of the greatest strikes in the industrial history of the country [emphasis added].”

With the strike in effect, the mines were left in charge of fire bosses, clerks, non-union men, and boys. The operators could not get men fast enough to keep the mines clear of water. The strikers, while remaining orderly, began a campaign to force the non-union men to quit work and to compel them to abandon the pumps. Water began to fill some of the mines and a few were abandoned entirely. The operators built stockades around their mines and washeries, manned them with coal and iron police, as they were permitted to do under the Pennsylvania law, and prepared for a long strike. The UMW had the support of roughly eighty percent of the workers, or more than 100,000 strikers, some 30,000 of whom left the region, many headed for Midwestern bituminous mines;

10,000 returned to Europe. (When the 1900 strike was declared, there were 8,000 members in the UMW; when the 1902 strike was declared, there were 140,000 members in the UMW.)

On May 20, 1902, the mine owners/operators met in New York City and decided to fight to a finish. Nothing but unconditional surrender of the miners would end the strike. They all agreed that they would never arbitrate with President John Mitchell or the UMW. The men, said the operators, must return to work, and then lay their grievances before their employers, who would then consider their grievances.

By early fall, the anthracite supply of the United States was practically exhausted. Profits were low in 1902 because of an over-supply; therefore the owners welcomed a moderately long strike. They had huge stockpiles which grew in value daily. It was illegal for the owners to conspire to shut down production, but not so if the miners went on strike. The owners welcomed the strike, but they adamantly refused to recognize the union, because they feared the union would control the coal industry by manipulating strikes.

Interesting statistics about the 1902 coal strike: Number of miners, laborers, and breaker boys ordered out: 147,000, with 3,000 still working, according to operators' estimates, quantity of coal shipped normally each week: 1,100,000 tons.

The "Demands" (if you please) of the strikers: 8-hour day, with the same pay as for 10-hour day; miners to get five per cent advance in contract price; miners' tons to be 2,240 pounds with one of their representatives to check the weights; minimum wage scale for laborers, similar to that in bituminous fields (average pay of miners, \$3.50 a day; laborers, \$1.70, slate boys, door boys, \$0.72).

Petitions poured into Washington for President Theodore Roosevelt to intervene. He did so, submitting a proposition to the miners that they return to work and that the differences between the miners and the operators be submitted to a commission to be appointed by the president.

Roosevelt, therefore, convened, on October 3, 1902, at the temporary White House in Washington, a conference of representatives of government, labor, and management. The union/UMWA (now an Irish-dominated organization) presumptuously and arrogantly, considered the mere holding of a meeting to be tantamount to union recognition and took a conciliatory tone.

The owners made it known to Roosevelt that strikers had killed over 20 men in the course of the strike (detailed accounts of all these killings by the striking miners and/or their representatives were published in the public press; see especially MOB VIOLENCE IN THE STRIKE. *Black Record of the Miners* "'Peaceful Protest"' as published in *The Sun*). Father H. J. O'Reilly, of the Church of the Annunciation, in Shenandoah, on August 10, "classed the leaders of the United Mine Workers as blackguards, hypocrites and politicians..."

The owners, in addition, urged Roosevelt "to use the power of government to protect the man who wants to work, and his wife and children when at work." With proper protection, said the mine owners (who refused to enter into any negotiations with the union) they would produce enough

coal to end the fuel shortage. On October 6, 1902, Governor Stone ordered out the entire National Guard of Pennsylvania, in order to protect the mines and the minority of men still working.

Roosevelt attempted to persuade the union to end the strike with a promise that he would create a commission to study the causes of the strike and propose a solution, which Roosevelt promised to support with all of the authority of his office. Mitchell scoffed at the suggestion and his membership endorsed his decision by a nearly unanimous vote. Similarly, the operators would not arbitrate, which infuriated Roosevelt, who informed J. P. Morgan that if the operators did not arbitrate that he would send the army to the anthracite coal fields to "dispossess the owners and run the mines as receivers."

**The Anthracite Coal Strike Commission:** The summer of 1902 turned into fall. A coal shortage loomed large, as anthracite was at the time the country's primary domestic fuel source. On October 1, 1902, Roosevelt sent a telegram to the operators and strike leaders, inviting them to a conference at the White House on October 3. Representatives of the operators and the miners went to Washington. They came to the table. The Anthracite Coal Strike Commission was established. This was the first time in American history that the federal government had ever assumed the authority to negotiate a labor dispute that was affecting the national interest. [emphasis added]

The seven members of the Anthracite Coal Strike Commission were: General John M. Wilson, brigadier general, U.S.A., retired; E. W. Parker, of Washington, an expert mining engineer; Judge George Gray, of Washington; E. E. Clark, grand chief of the Brotherhood of Railway Conductors; Thomas H. Watkins, of Scranton, a man practically involved with the mining and selling of coal; Bishop John L. Spaulding, of Peoria, IL.; and Carroll Davidson Wright, author of many books on labor questions.

Carroll D. Wright, the commissioner of labor, was named the recorder of the arbitrators. Wright used the staff of the Department of Labor to collect data about the cost of living in the coalfields. Bishop Spaulding was appointed to arbitrate the dispute between the operators and the miners.

End of Part I of this 2-part article on the 1902 Coal Strike.

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